

**TOWN/COMMERCIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**Meeting**

**April 8, 2004**

Members present: Barry Roberts (Chair); Bruce Carson, Peter Grandonico, Jr., Jerry Jolly, Cinda Jones, Mark Parent, Nick Seamon  
Staff present: Jonathan Tucker (Planning Dept.)  
Others present: Martha Lyon (consultant), Marc Lambert (ArtShow)

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:28 p.m. in the Town Room, Town Hall.

**APPEARANCES**

**Amherst Preservation Plan** - Ms. Lyon introduced herself as the consultant to the Amherst Historical Commission. She summarized the history and purpose of the project in which she was engaged, developing an historic preservation plan for the community. She had a series of questions for the TCRC members.

**Was the TCRC aware of or familiar with the work of the Historical Commission?** Mr. Carson, Mr. Seamon and others said they were not. Ms. Jones said she was, through the participation of family members. Mr. Roberts said he had encountered the Commission through the demolition delay process. Mr. Grandonico said his family was involved with the commission in Hatfield.

**Is the TCRC aware of Amherst's National Historic Register Districts?** Mr. Seamon said he knew of the Dickinson District because his business was located in it. Others were not aware of Amherst's districts. Mr. Parent said he had some exposure to them through involvement with the CPAC.

**Are historic resources advantageous to business in Amherst?** Mr. Parent said that the town's historic appearance was important – its character was a draw for visitors. There was general agreement.

**Why do people visit Amherst?** Mr. Parent said he thought the colleges and UMass were the principal draw. The community's historical character was a secondary reason.

**What aspects of historical character are important?** Mr. Parent said it was the look and feel it gave the town. The new 'period' light poles, for instance. He wished there had been more historic preservation activity before the Amherst Saving Bank (Fleet Bank) building had been built. There was a town-wide effect.

Mr. Grandonico said it was the buildings and their appearance, including the older homes along residential streets. Ms. Lyon said, so from the standpoint of business, it was the feel of the place that made historic character important?

Mr., Roberts said townspeople take it for granted – it's just the landscape they're familiar with. Visitors and other people see Amherst as a quaint New England town. He said the commons and parks were important, too.

Mr. Grandonico said he didn't think historical character was the main downtown business draw. Visitors come downtown, but less so than other areas of town.

Mr. Roberts said Amherst was seeing increasing numbers of historic visitors. They had some economic impact, but Amherst's business economy wasn't centered around that tourism.

Mr. Parent said he was concerned how the Historical Commission interpreted its charter. He thought it should focus on specific historic areas, and not seek regulatory jurisdiction over everything. Mr. Tucker explained the Commission's responsibilities under state law.

Mr. Roberts said that people were concerned about restrictions resulting from historic designations. Mr. Tucker said that National Historic Register designation imposed no restrictions on private property owners, and only involved reviews if state or federal funds were involved in a project. Ms. Lyon agreed, saying it was only local historic districts (a form of zoning) that could impose restrictions. She said it sounded as if it would be helpful if the Historical Commission educated people about that.

Mr. Roberts asked that the Commission notify the TCRC before proposing any new regulations under the preservation plan currently in development, especially any regulations which might impact businesses.

**Are the current historic preservation regulations (demo delay and review of changes to historic properties) effective, problematic or hampering of business? How could such regulations help business?**

Mr. Parent said the question was premature. The TCRC should add the Historical Commission to its list of people to interview about the permit process. He noted the effect of the demo delay bylaw on houses on South Prospect and Triangle Streets. Mr. Roberts said he didn't think either house had been historically significant.

Mr. Jolly asked about the extent of the Commission's ability to review projects. Mr. Tucker summarized that extent.

**Would façade improvement funding projects help?** Mr. Parent said they would, and there was general agreement.

Ms. Jones asked if undeveloped land was a target for historical preservation designations. Ms. Lyon said other Town boards addressed that question.

Mr. Roberts thanked Ms. Lyon for her help.

**ArtShow** – Marc Lambert presented a request from the organizers of this downtown arts festival for TCRC support of requests (to be made to the Select Board) for tent locations and parking arrangements for the festival. The organizers were requesting:

- ~ Select Board permission to use the public way (sidewalks (for the festival and its tents.
- ~ Reserved on-street and off-street parking for artists
- ~ A waiver of the need for festival trash pick-up (little trash expected)
- ~ Access to electrical power from nearby light poles

The organizers were also seeking help with fundraising ideas and a volunteer business relations coordinator to serve as liaison between the festival and local merchants.

The TCRC reviewed mapped tent locations. Mr. Parent said it looked a little spread out. Mr. Jolly said that was good – it would spread the benefits of the festival through most of the downtown. He said a map handout for customers and entertainment would be good ideas.

Mr. Grandonico asked about the festival hours. Mr. Lambert said it would run from 10 a.m. to dusk.

Mr. Seamon said he liked it spread out – it benefited everyone. Mr. Carson agreed that music was a good idea.

Mr. Jolly asked if the festival organizers had consider including crafts as well as fine art. Mr. Lambert said that was possible in the future. The organizers preferred to start with a unique event. Mr. Jolly recommended bringing the proposal to the Promoting Downtown Amherst (PDA) membership – it could help share the organizational load.

After further discussion, the Town/Commercial Relations Committee voted unanimously (6-0) to support the ArtShow project, and to recommend that the Select Board approve the following:

- Proposed ArtShow tent locations in the public way
- Artist parking at adjacent parking meters, not to exceed one parking space (vehicle)/tent
- Artist use of an appropriate number of longer-term parking spaces in the lower level of the Boltwood Walk parking garage.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**Parking Commission** – The TCRC reviewed a draft amended charge including an expansion to 11 members and the absorption of the Parking Commission. The Chair was authorized to approve a letter to the Select Board on the matter.

**Permit Process** – Mr. Parent summarized progress on the matter. Mr. Roberts said he was worried about not getting the viewpoint of businesses and contractors. The TCRC needed better outreach on this, perhaps surveys.

Mr. Parent said that could be included in the outline. A mailing list could be developed from permit applications from the last few years. Mr. Seamon said it should include architects and related consultants, too.

Mr. Tucker stressed the need for the Permit Process Subcommittee to meet to discuss these matters. The members said they would discuss possible dates.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

April 29<sup>th</sup> was set as the next TCRC meeting date.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Jonathan Tucker, Senior Planner